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Building Congo, Writing Empire: The Literary Labours of Henry Morton Stanley

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Abstract

The Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley was one of the most important figures in the foundation and early development of the Congo Free State. But he was also the most consistently popular European travel writer of the late nineteenth century, and his bestselling accounts of African expeditions did much to foster the 'myth of the Dark Continent'. These adventures were characterized by dramatic and violent encounters with 'natives' and fleeting impressions of the flora and fauna of Central Africa. Stanley's preferred formula was a sensational quest towards an ostensible goal: the 'finding' of Livingstone or the search for the sources of the Nile. His *Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (1885) offered something ostensibly more prosaic: a 'story of work and exploration'. While Stanley's book was received with enthusiasm by many, the markedly 'European' nature of the project also presented problems. His famous search for Livingstone and his subsequent 'Anglo-American' expedition across equatorial Africa had been funded by the British and American press and both missions hailed as the exclusive achievements of the 'Anglo-Saxon race'. But now Stanley was exploring and 'working' for the Francophone King of the Belgians. This article argues that Stanley explicitly presents his literary productions (journalism, travel writing, and lectures) as an important part of the work of exploration and empire building.

Keywords: Africa; Congo; empire; exploration; travel writing; Thomas Carlyle; Henry Morton Stanley; Victorian; race; exhibitions; colonial

The Welsh-American explorer Henry Morton Stanley was one of the most important figures in the foundation and development of the Congo Free State. He was also one of the most consistently popular European travel writers of the late nineteenth century, and his bestselling narratives of African expeditions did more than any other literary source to foster what Patrick Brantlinger has labeled the 'myth of the Dark Continent'. Stanley's bestsellers, such as *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) and *In Darkest Africa* (1890), were characterized by dramatic and violent encounters with the indigenous population and fleeting impressions of the flora and fauna of Central Africa. His

preferred formula was a sensational quest towards an ostensible goal: the search for Livingstone or the hunt for the sources of the Nile. Stanley's *The Congo and the Founding of its Free State* (1885), however, offered something less exotic and ostensibly more prosaic: a chronicle of 'work and exploration'. Unlike his earlier travelogues, Stanley narrated the experiences of a resident colonizer rather than the fleeting impressions of an itinerant explorer. And yet many readers appear to have been entranced by Stanley's bulky account. The *Times* gushed that Stanley's 'deliberate attempt to create a new State' was a task 'probably unprecedented in the history of the world'. The *Telegraph* praised Stanley's book as 'a masterly history of the most romantic undertaking our generation has known'.¹

As Robert Burroughs has recently shown, European debates about the ethics and efficacy of empire – and the limits of acceptable violence and force – were often mediated by the genre of popular travel writing and eyewitness journalism. Historians and biographers have given significant attention to Stanley's work in the Congo (especially in relation to subsequent scandals and atrocities) but few have discussed the role played by Stanley's literary works in the reception of the International Association and the emergence of the Congo Free State.² This is surprising given that Stanley explicitly invests his narratives with a performative agency of their own. As he records in his 1885 preface to the *Congo*, the 'impulse' of Europeans to colonize Central Africa is 'still throbbing and permeating through Europe': 'These volumes will tend to quicken rather than allay the fever. They will be printed in eight different languages, and the words of enterprise and action, it is hoped, will move many a man out of the 35,000,000 of Europe to be up and doing' (vii–viii).³ Stanley's *Congo* satisfied readers with its romantic account of the author's own 'work and exploration', but it was also intended to goad into action a new generation of colonists and labourers, travellers and travel *writers*. The present article will examine Stanley's *work* in multiple senses of that term. More specifically, it will argue that Stanley explicitly presents his literary productions (journalism, travel writing, and lectures) as an important part of the work of exploration and empire building. This theme runs across Stanley's entire career and oeuvre, but it is during the period roughly contemporary with the founding of the Congo Free State that Stanley explicitly presents colony building and travel writing as entwined imperial endeavors.

Literary Labour and the Work of Empire

In a 1904 obituary in the *Cornhill Magazine*, the journalist and historian Sidney Low credited Stanley with a Protestant piety and choleric Celtic temperament characteristic of Britain's nonconformist fringe. More specifically, he drew a comparison between the Welsh explorer and the Scottish historian and social critic Thomas Carlyle. Like Carlyle, Stanley 'held that strength is based on righteousness, and that the strong should inherit the earth; and saw no reason why there

should be any undue delay in claiming the inheritance' (35–36). In *Past and Present* (1843) Carlyle had outlined his famous 'gospel of work'. Arguing for the 'perennial nobleness, and even sacredness' of work, he warned against the 'perpetual despair' engendered by idleness. Work was not only a moral good in itself, it was also the means through which the individual 'perfects himself'. For Carlyle, work provided the 'means by which human beings fulfill their obligation to reduce chaotic nature to the condition of beneficent order' (Morrow 106). In *Past and Present*, Carlyle presents this ideal through an analogy that would have appealed to Stanley: '[foul] jungles are cleared away, fair seedfields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby' (269). Throughout *The Congo*, Stanley's presents his own laborious task in similar terms. A chapter entitled 'The Founding of Vivi: A Story of Work' begins:

A more cruel or less promising task than to conquer the sternness of that austere and sombre region of Vivi could scarcely be conceived. Its large bold features of solidity, ruggedness, impassiveness, the chaos of stones, worthless scrub, and tangle of grass in hollow, on slope, or summit, breathed a grim defiance that was undeniable. Yet our task was to temper this obstinacy, to make the position scaleable, even accessible; to quicken that cold lifelessness; to reduce that grim defiance to perfect submission; in a word, to infuse vigorous animation into a scene which no one but the most devoted standard-bearer of Philanthropy could ever have looked at twice with a view to its value . . . the power of man is great, though he is a feeble, perishable creature; with little strokes but many, he has before this performed marvels; his working life counts but a handful of hours, but with every hour — industry inspiring him — he makes his mark, and many marks may make a road. (1.140–141)

Stanley's references to tempering the 'obstinacy' of the African bush and reducing 'grim defiance to perfect submission' clearly highlight the close relationship between the taming of the environment and the subordination of local populations. But he also quickly moves beyond the immediate colonial content to make a more general point about the 'power of man' to make his mark upon an indifferent landscape.

In the same chapter, Stanley narrates his experiences as an evangelist for the gospel of work. Waxing lyrical over the 'inspiring sound' made by his own men ('striking picks, ringing hoes, metallic strokes of crowbars, and dull thudding of sledgehammers'), Stanley's gaze turns to the partially-clothed bodies of the locals: 'they stood empty-handed with brawny muscles which made me envious, and suggested other thoughts' (1.142). A Carlylean erotics of work continually colours Stanley's view of African bodies as potential agents (or tools) of colonial labour: 'what strength lay

in their arms and willingness in their spirits for labour!’ (1.143). After prolonged negotiations, Stanley and his Ki-Kongo translator eventually convince the locals to trade their labour in exchange for gifts of cloth, beads and rum. The ensuing scene affords Stanley a utopian premonition of indolent Africa ‘aroused’ by the ‘spirit of industry’ (1.142):

I count sixty-five men, women, and children of Vivi on the summit of the hill, clearing its face of the rough stones so thickly strewn, and cutting the scrub bush and levelling the ant mounds. I, on the search for omens, like the men of old on the verge of enterprises, take this sight to be a happy augury of the future. (1.144)

But Stanley on his African journeys carried not merely the spirit of Carlyle but the books themselves. At the outset of the trans-continental ‘Anglo-American Expedition’ of 1874–77 his caravan included a 180 lb cargo of books. His eclectic library comprised classical authors, Augustan poets, and contemporary novelists (including Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot). As the number of carriers dwindled through illness, death and desertion, Stanley was forced to abandon these luxuries ‘until finally, when less than three hundred miles from the Atlantic, I possessed only the Bible, Shakespeare, Carlyle’s “Sartor Resartus”, Norie’s Navigation, and the Nautical Almanac for 1877’ (‘Mr. Stanley’ 85). As John Morrow has shown, *Sartor Resartus* includes an early iteration of Carlyle’s gospel of work. Through his satirical portrait of the philosopher Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Carlyle outlines ‘an ideal of stoic self-fulfillment in which a commitment to action was informed by an ethic of renunciation’ (Morrow 105). It is significant that the fragments Stanley has shored against his ruin include not only Carlyle, the Bible and Shakespeare but also a more obscure ‘Nautical Almanac’. The latter is perhaps a close cousin of the *Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* salvaged by Conrad’s Marlow on his own journey up the Congo. Although ‘not a very enthralling book’, Marlow praises this grubby volume for its ‘singleness of intention, an honest concern for the right way of going to work’ (65).⁴

Stanley directly quotes from *Sartor Resartus* in a self-justificatory fashion as an epigram to Chapter Three of *The Congo*:

How often have we seen some such adventurer, and much censured wanderer, light on some outlying and neglected province, the hidden treasures of which he first discovered, and kept proclaiming till the general eyes and effort were directed thither, and the conquest was completed, thereby in these his seemingly aimless rambles planting new standards and founding new habitable colonies. (1.20)

In the original passage, Carlyle had specifically located these ‘new habitable colonies’ in the ‘immeasurable circumambient realm of Nothingness and Night’ (3), a formulation that chimes with Hegel’s characterization of Africa as a ‘land of childhood ... enveloped in the dark mantle of Night’ (91). The journeys described here by Carlyle, however, are entirely figurative: the original passage is a defence of the value of free critical enquiry and esoteric philosophical speculation. No equatorial forest, the ‘outlying, neglected, yet vitally momentous province’ is rather the obscure object of philosophical inquiry. Is Stanley willfully ignoring the context here? Perhaps. But Carlyle, too, was actively blurring the distinction between military, political, and literary heroism in ways that would have appealed to the explorer–journalist.

In his lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840), Carlyle had argued that the history of every nation was ‘at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here’ (239). And he went on to suggest that there was no real difference between military, political, religious or literary heroism. Dante might have led his nation in battle if the age had demanded and ‘Napoleon has words in him which are like Austerlitz Battles’ (312). No one claimed such an honour for Stanley, but the explorer was successful nonetheless in presenting a public image as both imperial man of action and – in Carlyle’s phrase – ‘The Hero as Man of Letters’.

For the journalist W.T. Stead, writing in 1890, Stanley was the very embodiment of the mass-media high-imperial age. In the prefatory essay to his new transatlantic journal, the *Review of Reviews*, Stead sketched some of his aims and principles, including his Carlylean commitment to the role of individual personalities in shaping the historical and cultural moment. ‘To know the character of the leading actor in the contemporary drama’, he wrote, ‘is essential to the right understanding of its history and its literature’ (14). The very first issue of Stead’s magazine began with an eight-page sketch of Stanley, explaining that ‘it was the attention which [Stanley] drew to Central Africa through the press which set on foot that scramble for Africa which is the most conspicuous feature of our day’ (27). Stead’s portrait highlights the innate ambivalence of the celebrity explorer, who simultaneously glamorized the untamed wilderness of Africa while engaging directly in the mapping, state-building, and appropriation of indigenous lands which made possible European dominion over Africa. As David Spurr has argued, the ‘metaphorical notion of the writer as coloniser ought to be considered as more than a mere figure of speech, given the practical role which writing plays in the actual processes of colonial expansion and administration’ (93). The exploration narrative was the means by which this process is documented, represented and – through the perlocutionary force of imperial rhetoric – enacted.⁵

Historians of exploration have traced a rising tide of ‘professionalism’ in nineteenth-century cultures of exploration (Driver, Kennedy). As expeditions ceased to be mere adventures, travel became an organized knowledge gathering enterprise regulated by new institutions like the Royal

Geographical Society. Furthermore, the relatively undeveloped European colonial presence in Africa meant that 'African explorers main rewards came in the form of profit from the books they wrote about their journeys' (Kennedy 84). Literary labour was a key ingredient in the making of the newly professionalized explorer, and the bulky two-volume travel book became the primary means through which figures like Stanley confirmed their status as professional explorers and scientific travellers.

Not all genres of travel narrative were equally respectable, however, and Stanley's previous career as a popular journalist left him open to allegations of sensationalism and mendacity. His account of 'work and exploration' in *The Congo* begins with an attack upon critics and naysayers:

A WISE Englishman has said that pure impulses and noble purposes have been oftener thwarted by the devil under the name of Quixotism than by any other insinuating phrase of obstruction. In 1878 that word was flung in my teeth several times, especially by Manchester men. If I delivered a speech or a lecture, or wrote a letter, about the probabilities of success attending a judiciously conducted enterprise in Africa, a Manchester editor, or a Manchester merchant, almost invariably taunted me with being a 'dreamer,' a 'Quixotic journalist,' or a mere 'penny-a-liner.' I do not quarrel with the phrases, but I certainly deprecate the uses to which they were applied. The charge of Quixotism, being directed against my mission, deterred many noble men in Manchester from studying the question of new markets, and deepened unjustly their prejudices against Africa and African projects.

The passage is symptomatic of how Stanley conceived of his activities as journalist, lecturer and author in terms of the broader imperial project. Ironically, given Stanley's commitment to the performative force of his own writing, his reputation as a sensational journalist prejudices the cynical 'Manchester Men' against his testimony. The problem with courting the image of the imperial knight errant is that one also runs the risk of tilting at windmills. But who, on this occasion, was the 'wise Englishman'? Later in *The Congo*, Stanley again cites Carlyle as a 'wise Briton', but on this occasion he appears to be alluding to another prominent social critic—John Ruskin. The passage to which Stanley refers, comes from an 1853 lecture on church architecture in which Ruskin had opined that the 'great evil of these days is that we try to destroy the romantic feeling, instead of bridling and directing it'. Ever since the time of Cervantes and his cynical critique of chivalry and heroism, 'the purest impulses and the noblest purposes have perhaps been oftener stayed by the devil, under the name of Quixotism, than under any other base name or false allegation' (64–65). Interestingly, although Stanley distorts and strains the context of his quotation, Ruskin's reference to 'pure impulses' and 'noble purposes' is transmitted undiluted. And yet, as

Ruskin makes clear, if ‘impulse’ is to yield a ‘noble purpose’, it must also be ‘bridled’ and ‘directed’.

International Associations

In his breakthrough quest narrative, *How I Found Livingstone* (1872), Stanley had invoked Carlyean models of masculine sociability for his account of his Scottish missionary mentor. Livingstone, readers were informed, possessed ‘a laugh as Herr Teufelsdröckh’s – a laugh of the whole man from head to heel. If he told a story, he related it in such a way as to convince one of its truthfulness; his face was so lit up by the sly fun it contained, that I was sure the story was worth relating, and worth listening to’ (349). In *How I Found Livingstone* Stanley self-consciously dramatized his continual struggle to aspire to this Anglo-Saxon ideal of emotional propriety. But this struggle also reflected a contemporary concern with transatlantic sociability, one embodied in the characters of Stanley, the impetuous but determined Yankee, and Livingstone, the stoical and pious Scot (Murray; Pettitt 88).

There was always a wide international readership for Stanley’s works, and *The Congo* was no exception. By 1886 it had been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, Swedish, Danish and Dutch (Vinck 18). The explicitly international character of Stanley’s work for Leopold presented problems, however. The search for Livingstone and the subsequent ‘Anglo-American’ Expedition across the African continent had been portrayed in public as the combined achievements of the Anglo-Saxon race and as a collaboration between the British and American presses (London’s *Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Herald*). By contrast, Stanley was now working in the interests of the King of the Belgians. On entering the service of Leopold and the International Association, Stanley was forced to broaden his ‘Anglo-Saxon’ imperial vision to embrace a rather more nebulous Northern Europeanness that necessarily included Germans, Belgians, Dutch, Danes, and Swedes. As James Newman has shown, Leopold insisted that Stanley repress all chauvinistic opinions, even reading the manuscript of *The Congo* and suggesting revisions to passages in which Stanley had criticized French and Portuguese rivals (210). Thus the cult of Anglo-Saxon manliness was transformed into the more expansive and ecumenical ‘gospel of enterprise’ (2.377). In a chapter of *The Congo* devoted to ‘Europeans in Africa’, Stanley offers a series of exemplary biographical portraits, presented as ideal national types:

In the above sketches of noble characters, others who may aspire after distinction in the fields of work may discover what special attributes are necessary for honourable mention and are most appreciated. All of them are beautifully and clearly summed up in the words of

Solomon, the wisest of men: ‘Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings!’ (2.278)

Stanley’s citation from the Hebrew Proverbs (22:29) is directly followed by two more quotations, each of which emphasizes a shared European inheritance from antiquity. The first is attributed to a ‘wise Greek’ (Socrates), the second to a ‘wise Briton’: ‘The most unhappy of all men is he who cannot tell what he is going to do, who has got no work cut out for him in the world, and does not go into it. For work is the grand cure of all the maladies and miseries that ever beset mankind — honest work which you intend getting done’ (2. 278). It is striking example of Stanley’s indebtedness to Carlyle, that he offers the above citation from the latter’s 1866 inaugural address to Edinburgh University, as a seeming culmination and synthesis of the Hebraic and Hellenic wisdom of Solomon and Socrates. However, his point is not simply to privilege the work ethic of imperial Britons and to position his own race as the inheritors of classical and biblical antiquity. From Israel to Edinburgh, the ubiquity and continuity of the gospel of work testifies to its universal application to all civilized peoples and to its significance as an epic account of ‘international association’: ‘Surely if what the Jew, Greek, and Briton uttered each to his own nation is true, it must be also true for the two hundred and sixty Belgians, British, French, Germans, Swedes, and Americans who during the last six years have tried their fortunes on the Congo’ (2. 278–79).

In Stanley’s text, however, the exemplary nature of these heroic sketches is directly contrasted with a litany of unfit European types, including gluttons, boozers, melancholics, and ‘malingerers’, who have hindered the progress of civilization on the Congo. The autobiographical portion of Stanley’s book begins with a cautionary tale on the perils of idleness. On his return from the Anglo-American Expedition Stanley dives back into literary work, dashing off his bestselling travelogue *Through the Dark Continent* (1878). But what next?

[F]or the first time in many years I felt free—free to move, to act as I pleased, unrestrained by pledges or promises, and without that terrible, compelling and oppressive law—duty—with its constant and persistent call to action, hanging over my head. Lightened of all cause to labour, I hastened to the neighbouring continent to indulge in that luxury which in my travels through Europe, years before, I had seen so many thousands doing—viz., lounging. (1. 22–23)

Unsurprisingly, Stanley the *flâneur* is a complete failure. He tries ‘sipping coffee with indolent attitudes on the flagstones of the Parisian boulevards’ and tests ‘the merits of Pilsen and Strasburg beer’ but finds each stimulant ‘insipid and joyless’. Such ‘vanities’ are ‘productive of nothing but

loss of time, health, and usefulness'. His brief flirtation with decadence and self-indulgence quickly leads to 'declining health and increasing moody spirits'. Nevertheless, after a restorative 'three weeks of pedestrian exercise' in Switzerland he shrugs off his 'morbid feelings, shattered constitution, and wrecked system' and, with renewed health and vigour, begins planning his next adventure (1. 23). The subtitle to this section of Stanley's tale – 'The Sequel to the Book "Through the Dark Continent"' – also neatly elides the distinction between literary production and the work of empire: the 'sequel' could refer to the volume we are reading (Stanley's *The Congo*), but, equally, imply that the colonial scheme described therein is a fitting sequel to his previous quest.⁶

Performing Labour

Although Stanley's most recent biographer, Tim Jeal, has gone to great lengths to portray the explorer as a reluctant celebrity, contemporary commentators frequently emphasized Stanley's penchant for sensationalism and showmanship (Driver 117–69). The lecture circuit was highly profitable for Stanley and occupied most of his time between expeditions. As early as 1873, the legendary showman P. T. Barnum had attempted to recruit the explorer, and Stanley's 1878 lecture tour of Britain was managed by Richard D'Oyly Carte, owner of the Savoy Theatre and the impresario behind Gilbert and Sullivan's comic operas.⁷ When thinking about Stanley's travel narratives as performative – as texts which *do* something – we should not ignore the multiple platforms on which Stanley presented his narratives literally as performances. In this regard, Stanley's lectures and public speeches offer compelling case studies in the rhetoric and performance of both the labours of empire and the work of the author-explorer.

Shortly after his return from the Congo in 1884, palm oil magnate James Hutton introduced Stanley to the Manchester Chamber of Commerce. In his prefatory remarks, Hutton strikes a markedly evangelical tone. Stanley, it appears, is the bearer of Good News:

He is here to tell us that these millions on the banks of the Congo are eager for our trade; he is here also to show us how the freedom of these Africans may be maintained, and how the complete freedom of commerce of all countries may be established and how all custom houses and all vexatious restrictions and impediments to trade may be utterly abolished and swept away from the banks of the Congo. (Cheers) (4–5)

Hutton presents the campaign for Free Trade as an abolitionist cause, claiming that it will bring freedom to Africans (freedom to consume the commodities of Manchester, at least). In his own speech Stanley follows Hutton's lead, looking forward, with prophetic zeal, to the day when: 'the Lower Congo will be placed under some flag that shall guarantee to all the world that its waters and

banks are absolutely free' (14). There is ambiguity again here in Stanley's use of the term 'free'. The population of the Congo stands to be liberated by the actions of abolitionist and missionary philanthropists, but their labour and resources are also a commodity on special offer to the men of Manchester. In his lecture Stanley freely mingles dry calculation with dreamy speculation. As his hypothetical scheme unfolds, he blends economic forecasts with experiments in magical thinking:

I was interested the other day in making a curious calculation, which was supposing that all the inhabitants of the Congo basin were simply to have one Sunday dress each, how many yards of Manchester cloth would be required; and the amazing number was 320,000,000 yards, just for one Sunday dress! (Cheers) Then the grave cloths came into mind and ... I estimate that, if my figures of population are approximately correct, 2,000,000 die every year, and to bury these decently, and according to the custom of those who possess cloth, 16,000,000 yards will be required, while the 40,000 chiefs will require an average of 100 yards each, or 4,000,000 yards. I regarded these figures with great satisfaction ... (12)

Stanley's fantasy of the Congo as a limitless market for the commodities of Manchester is presented by means of an explicit image of dead African bodies draped in white cotton shrouds. The preceding image of Congolese natives turned out in their Sunday best seems to presuppose the institution of the culture and traditions of Christendom, but Stanley evidently sees Africans as consumers rather than producers or potential capitalists. 'It is the easiest matter to teach Africans to wear cotton dresses', he explains, 'but centuries must elapse before they can make their own cottons' (25). As Stanley discloses in *The Congo*, his own definition of philanthropy is inseparable from the practical commercial interests of the colonizer. The activities of the International Association are 'philanthropic, inasmuch as our principal aim is to open the interior by weaning the tribes below and above from that savage and suspicious state which they are now in, and to rouse them up to give material aid voluntarily' (1.30). Stanley concludes his Manchester sermon upon the gospel of enterprise with a flurry of apostrophes, again recalling the Old Testament verbosity of Carlyle:

And you, O men of Manchester! Have done with these doubts and surmises, and oblique distorted view of this work. Search into it as deep as you may, explore around and probe through it with clear eyes. Be not over anxious to rob yourselves and your children of this expansive field for their effort. (28)

Although much of Stanley's rhetoric revolves around promoting the idea of Africa as a market for European commodities, he also photographed, sketched, collected, and plundered large quantities of African objects during his travels. *Through the Dark Continent* offers a glimpse of his rather arbitrary methodology of collecting. In June 1876 he arrived at a burnt-out village on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, scattered with dismembered corpses and the possessions of the former occupants: 'stools, mats, spears, drinking-vessels, cooking-pots of all sizes, walking-staffs, war clubs, baskets, trenchers, wooden basins, scoops, etc.' With objects 'scattered in such numbers', observes Stanley, 'an African Museum might have been completely stocked' (2.20).

John Plotz suggests that the influx 'from the edges of empire' of 'core artifacts still freighted with foreign meaning' was a source of anxiety in Victorian Britain. Such objects might 'refuse to become commodities, and instead keep their "native" cultural essence about them', a reversal of the diffusionist project to push the commodities of Manchester on pacified Africans (22). And yet at many colonial exhibitions across Europe, these objects were enlisted to promote the empire as a philanthropic knowledge gathering enterprise. Stanley himself played an important role in the establishment one of the major African exhibitions of the period: The Stanley and African Exhibition at the Victoria Gallery, Regent's Street (held to coincide with the explorer's return from the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition in 1890). Like Stanley's bestselling travelogues, these exhibitions often had strong narrative content (Driver 151–57). As Annie Coombes points out, the visitor to the Stanley and African Exhibition was 'constructed through the narrative of the expedition, as an explorer' and was thus 'able to gain the "experience" of the seasoned traveller' (69).

Stanley himself was a frequent visitor to African exhibitions. In September 1897, for example, he visited a Congo exhibition outside Brussels, which shortly after became the site of Leopold's new Musée du Congo. Travelling to Tervuren by the new electric tram, the explorer was delighted by the informative exhibits and the 'superb furniture in Congo wood, & excellent work in ivory'.⁸ He also visited the Congo Free State pavilion at the Antwerp Universal Exhibition of 1885, 'comprised of three parts: one on exports; one on potential imports, especially crops; and one on ethnography' (Stanard 35). The section on ethnography even included a reconstructed village, occupied by twelve Congolese locals and Masala, the local chieftain of Vivi – a district where Stanley had established a riverside station (Hodeir 248). In a letter written from Zurich to his future wife Dorothy Tennant in London, Stanley offers a detailed account of the Antwerp pavilion:

The flag of the Congo Free State on its tall staff waved proudly side by side with other national emblems. For a moment a glow of pride filled me. But shortly a sense of something like guilt filled me. For I saw before me a duplicate building of my chalet at Vivi, and half a dozen Congo huts, & above waved another Free State flag. I was *incog*. Suppose someone

there recognised me, how I would blush to be caught. Hallo! Mr. Stanley You here! & then a crowd of people, the prurient Belgian Press minutely describing me, how I looked, how my moustache had grown &c. So I reconnoitred the building with furtive glances, slyly eyed the people around & in it, and by & bye [sic] joined in with the crowd and went in.

The motivation for Stanley's fluctuation between pride and guilt here is difficult to unpack. However, it does seem to be rooted in his ambivalent embrace of the idea of the Congo Free State on one hand (the flag waving proudly) and the means by which this political goal was achieved on the other (as represented by the replica of his own chalet). But what is clear is that these representations managed to evoke some of the sublimated feelings associated with Stanley's exploratory and colony-building expeditions in the Congo. Indeed, Stanley even draws attention to how his self-promotion has encouraged a 'prurient' obsession with his physical appearance. He attempts to escape attention through disguise and immersion in the crowd, but runs headlong into his own reflected image:

[As] I ascended the topmost step leading in I saw a full length picture of myself regarding me with a good natured humorous glance. And again I felt that curious feeling of guilt. But mounting courage I went in behind a portly *Flamande* & guiltily looked at trophies of the chase, of war, & peaceful barter which I myself had sent to the *Comité* ... Those long spear like oars! Just eight years ago I captured them in battle with the Basoko of the Aruwimi. That innocent-looking drum was given to me by the slaves of the Lualaba, those bows and arrows. Ah many of them were taken by me during that stressful period we drove our way through the forests of Stanley Falls in 1877. And thus and thus my thoughts kept time with each new object that my furtive glances espied.⁹

Like the exploration narrative, colonial spectacles had a performative and perlocutionary force: they enacted and enforced the imperial fantasies they claimed to represent. By naturalizing the 'primitive' nature of African culture, the modernity and maturity of European civilization was enshrined and vindicated. What are we to make of Stanley's repeated emphasis on his own sense of guilt here? Is this an intimation of the violence and exploitation to come in the near future? Or perhaps a tacit admission – in private, at least – of Stanley's exploitative tactics in securing treaties with Congolese chiefs and sovereigns. In the absence of similar passages elsewhere in Stanley's papers or published works, it is impossible to say. But what is clear is that Stanley's guilt is prompted, first, by the 'national emblems' of the Congo Free State, and, secondly, by the recreations and representations of his own narrative. In this extraordinary moment of recognition,

Stanley catches a glimpse of his own image projected onto posterity, not as laboring literary hero, but as artful imperial villain.

¹ Quoted in *Publishers Circular* 48 (1 July 1885): 618.

² The most compelling critique of Stanley's Congo service and his complicity with Leopold's murderous regime is found in Adam Hochschild (61–74). James Newman makes a more nuanced case, emphasizing Stanley's naivety in his dealing with Leopold and his entourage. Stanley's most recent biographer, Tim Jeal, has attempted to exonerate the explorer entirely by drawing a firm distinction between Stanley's work for the International Association and the brutality of Free State regime. David Van Reybrouck makes use of local oral histories in a fascinating discussion of Stanley's expeditions from the Congolese perspective (34–49). Tim Youngs offers the most sustained critique of Stanley's writing and its commercial and critical reception in his detailed discussion of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition (113–181).

³ Vinck includes a wonderfully detailed study of the initial English publication and early translations.

⁴ Conrad travelled up the Congo in 1890. In a 1926 essay he alludes to Stanley's Anglo-American Expedition as 'a prosaic newspaper "stunt"', which unleashed 'the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration' (17).

⁵ On the perlocutionary aspect of the performative speech act see Austin (101–102).

⁶ In a similar vein, Stanley had presented the Anglo-American Expedition (described in *Through the Dark Continent*) as a mission to 'to complete the work left unfinished by the lamented death of Dr. Livingstone' (1.3).

⁷ P. T. Barnum to H.M. Stanley, New York, 8 Jan. 1873. Royal Museum of Central Africa (RMCA), Tervuren. Stanley Archive, MS 2820; *Era*, 15 Sept. 1878: 4.

⁸ H. M. Stanley to Dorothy Stanley, Brussels, 5 Sept. 1897. RMCA, MS 384.

⁹ HMS to Dorothy Tennant, Zurich, 6 Sept. 1885, RMCA, MS 166.

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